Southern Gold Society
FOUNDED 2001
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Newsletter

Dahlonega Mint Door Knocker Removed in 1861 or Salvaged from 1878 Fire

By David C. Crenshaw

As a lifelong enthusiast of numismatics, I'm captivated by the stories embedded in artifacts—silent relics that whisper secrets of the past if we listen closely. The brass door knocker from the Dahlonega Mint is one such enigma, its journey cloaked in mystery and contradiction. Was it removed by Federal officials at the Civil War's end in 1861, or did it withstand the 1878 fire that consumed the mint building, only to be salvaged from the ashes? This question, uncovered through my ongoing research into the Dahlonega Mint's history, drove me recently to Dahlonega, Georgia, to examine an archival photograph at the University of North Georgia's Special Collections.

The Dahlonega Mint, operational from 1838 to 1861, minted gold coins from local ore, weaving itself into the fabric of Southern history. After its closure, the building served the North Georgia Agricultural College until a devastating fire reduced it to ruins in 1878. Few artifacts survived, yet the door knocker endured. Conventional wisdom suggests it was removed during the postwar dismantling and later used at the New Orleans Mint until 1909. However, soot on its recessed back hints at exposure to the 1878 blaze, challenging the timeline and suggesting it may have remained until the building's collapse, perhaps retrieved from the debris.

Inspired by the insights of Al Adams and Carl Lester—authorities on Dahlonega's coinage and history whose work has deepened my research—I arrived at the Special Collections with high hopes. The photograph, a window into the past, captured the mint's facade in striking detail. I studied it closely, examining the double front doors. The right door showed no sign of a knocker, with the right door's surface bare in the image. The left door, however, was wide open, its front obscured, leaving me without a clear answer. Was the knocker already gone, or simply hidden from view? The ambiguity was tantalizing, a reminder that history often guards its secrets jealously.

Though the photograph didn't resolve the enigma, the visit was far from fruitless. Allison, the Special Collections & Digital Initiatives Librarian, offered insightful suggestions for further research—new archival sources and historical records that could illuminate the knocker's path. I'm eager to pursue these leads, driven by the same curiosity that fuels our Southern Gold Society community, where every discovery builds on collective passion. My gratitude goes to Al and Carl for their invaluable contributions to Dahlonega scholarship.

For now, the door knocker's story remains an open puzzle, blending history, mystery, and the thrill of the chase. I'll share any new findings in future SGS newsletters, hopeful that my research will unravel its full tale. In numismatics, as in life, the most rewarding quests are those that embrace patience, passion, and a touch of the unknown.

(Left) Numismatist David Crenshaw examines a historic photograph of the Dahlonega Mint at the University of North Georgia's Special Collections, seeking clues about the elusive brass door knocker's fate in the mint's storied past. **(Right)** A close-up view of the Dahlonega Mint's double front doors from a pre-1878 image. The right door stands bare, without a knocker, while the left door swings open, obscuring its surface—fueling the ongoing mystery of whether the brass relic was removed in 1861 or survived the devastating fire.

Unraveling the Mystery of the Dahlonega Mint Door Knocker's Missing Handle

In the September Southern Gold Society newsletter article, “Anne Amerson and the Dahlonega Mint Door Knocker,” a postscript noted that the door knocker donated to the Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library appeared to lack its handle, as observed by Carl Lester. This was evident when comparing the photograph in Anne Amerson’s 2002 article, which showed the handle intact, to the July 6, 2024, *Coin World* article, which depicted the knocker without it. David Crenshaw investigated the missing piece, and the mystery of the missing handle has been resolved.

Through collaboration with the Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, it has been confirmed that the knocker’s U-shaped handle is present but disassembled. The handle, with tips bent at 90-degree angles, is designed to fit into screws featuring holes through their bulbous heads. These screws, when inserted into the two holes on the knocker’s main body, secure it to a door while being aligned to allow the handle’s tips to pivot within the screw-head holes, enabling the knocking function. This design reflects the distinct structure of the Dahlonega Mint’s relic.

Southern Gold Society members are the first to learn the missing handle has been solved. The full story, accompanied by images from the Hargrett Library, will be featured in a forthcoming article in *Georgia Backroads* (Spring 2026), sharing the story of the knocker with a wider audience. For more information on *Georgia Backroads* magazine—a print publication devoted to Georgia history, nature, travel, and lifestyles—visit their website at georgiabackroads.com.

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Writers Needed

One of the purposes of the SGS is to “enjoy each member's knowledge.” This newsletter is one of the ways this numismatic knowledge is dispersed. The frequency of the newsletter is driven by the number of submissions for publication. The editor of the SGS eNewsletter needs new material and welcomes the opportunity to review your original article for publication. Articles should be relevant to the study of the gold coins and related history of the Dahlonega, Charlotte, and New Orleans branch mints and private minters Templeton Reid and the Bechtlers. If you do a presentation at a gathering or other venue, consider compiling your notes into an article. Do not worry about the grammar. The editor will do the rest. Electronic manuscripts should be submitted by email to contactus@southerngoldsociety.org.

Mission Statement

The Southern Gold Society was formed to increase the enjoyment and study of Southern gold coins and related history, through an informal, relaxed mix of education and fellowship. The society is reminiscent of those of a bygone era, in which connoisseurship and a gentlemanly appreciation of Southern gold coins is the order of the day.

Purpose

- To facilitate the enjoyment and study of the gold coins and related history of the Southern branch mints (Dahlonega, Charlotte, and New Orleans) and private Southern minters (Templeton Reid and the Bechtlers).
- To enjoy each member's knowledge and friendship in an informal manner.
- To provide a relaxed, pleasant environment in which to meet during selected coin shows and other convenient events.
- To encourage the appreciation and preservation of a Southern gold coin’s original surfaces.
- To consolidate the information, resources, and talent available to enthusiasts of these historic Southern gold coins.

Annual Membership Fees

Regular $25 (January-December).

Membership for new members joining in October, November, or December extends through the next year. Checks for membership fees should be made payable to the Southern Gold Society and mailed to David Crenshaw, P.O. Box 237, Dacula, GA 30019-0004.

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